



May 27, 2014

## KANSAS BULLETIN NO. KS300-14-25

### **SUBJECT: LTP–Environmental Quality Incentives Program–Fiscal Year 2014 Working Lands for Wildlife Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative**

**Action required by:** June 20, 2014 (Field Offices [FOs])

**Action required by:** July 18, 2014 (Area Offices [AOs])

**Action required by:** June 6, 2014 (State Office [SO])

**Purpose:** Provide guidance on administering the fiscal year (FY) 2014 Working Lands for Wildlife (WLFW) Lesser Prairie-Chicken Initiative (LPCI) available through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

**Expiration Date:** September 30, 2015

#### **Background**

WLFW LPCI is an effort between the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) that leverages capabilities and resources, targets assistance where it is most needed, cooperatively engages state and local partners, and collaboratively works with agricultural producers, forest land managers, and Tribes. The NRCS and the USFWS initially selected seven at-risk species whose decline can be reversed given sufficient resources and landowner participation. The WLFW LPCI promotes voluntary, incentive-based conservation on private and Tribal lands.

The primary objectives of WLFW LPCI are to:

- Provide landowners with financial and technical assistance to help them improve their lands through wildlife habitat management and protection.
- Implement conservation practices (CPs) that will help restore populations of declining wildlife species (candidate, federally listed endangered and threatened, or other at-risk wildlife species).
- Provide landowners with Endangered Species Act regulatory certainty and confidence that conservation investments they make on their lands today can help sustain their operations over the long term.

(more)

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### **Eligible Land Uses, Resource Concerns, and CPs**

The eligible land uses, resource concerns, and CPs are available in Attachment 1.

Core CP 645, Upland Wildlife Habitat Management, is required in the conservation plan and will receive financial assistance (FA) if not already established per program policy. Core CP 528, Prescribed Grazing, is required in the conservation plan in contracts where grazing occurs and will receive FA, if not already established, per program policy. Supporting CPs are eligible for WLFW-LPCI FA to the extent that they are needed to support the core CPs.

All WLFW LPCI applicants must agree to follow the CP standards and treatment measures as described in the USFWS 2013 LPCI Conference Opinion in order to be eligible for screening and ranking. This report is online at:  
[http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/Documents/R2ES/LPC\\_NRCS\\_CO\\_FINAL\\_22Nov2013.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/Documents/R2ES/LPC_NRCS_CO_FINAL_22Nov2013.pdf).

### **Screening Criteria**

Applications will be considered HIGH priority if more than 50 percent of the offered acreage is defined as "Focal Area" per the Crucial Habitat Assessment Tool (CHAT).

Applications will be considered MEDIUM priority if more than 50 percent of the offered acreage either:

- (1) Is classified as a "Connectivity Zone" per the CHAT, or
- (2) Has data indicating the presence of LPC use on the application acres and associated management unit

Applications will be considered LOW priority if more than 50 percent of the acreage is defined as "Modeled" Habitat per the CHAT.

All other applications outside of the above described "Screening Criteria" shall not be considered for funding through WLFW-LPCI and are **INELIGIBLE**.

See Attachment 3 for the WLFW-LPCI priority areas.

### **Program Contracts System (ProTracts) Ranking Tool**

The ProTracts fund code for WLFW-LPCI is LPCI.

National questions are consistent for all EQIP applications. Refer to Bulletin KS300-14-16 for additional information on national questions.

A copy of the state and local ranking questions is provided in Attachment 2.

**NOTE:** State issue question number one refers to active leks. Lek data Provided in the Conservation Programs Geographic Information System (GIS) Interface (CPGI) tool is for all known LPC leks, not necessarily all ACTIVE LPC leks. This data is provided to assist in answering LPCI state question number 1. Answering "yes" to this question will NOT be solely based on the CPGI data.

If a producer has identified an undocumented (not shown in GIS CPGI tool data) active lek on their operation, ranking points may be obtained if the active lek is confirmed by a Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPT) area biologist and an NRCS range conservationist.

Participants must be willing to share this information (documented in CPGI or undocumented) to receive points. Under a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, certain parts of the NRCS case file can be released.

### **Technical Assistance**

KDWPT area biologists will assist with LPC habitat assessments. Contract development, contract administration, contract reviews, and follow-up for WLFW-LPCI contracts is the responsibility of the NRCS.

### **Deadlines**

Although applications for EQIP are accepted continuously, the FY2014 application evaluation period cutoff date for WLFW-LPCI applications have been set for April 18, 2014. All applications received must be entered in ProTracts by April 23, 2014.

FOs have completed conservation plans and application rankings on May 16, 2014.

AOs have completed peer reviews of rankings on May 23, 2014.

The SO Programs Staff will make funding decisions by June 6, 2014.

All approved applications and documentation will be entered in electronic contracts (eContracts) for second level review by June, 20, 2014.

Assistant state conservationists for field operations will ensure that all contracts have been obligated in ProTracts by July 18, 2014.

The regional conservationist shall review and obligate all approved applications of \$150,000 or greater as outlined in Bulletin KS300-14-41. The assistant state conservationists for field operations (ASTCs-FO) shall submit questionnaires to the appropriate program manager as soon as possible to meet program deadlines.

**Contact.** Forward all questions through established channels to Chad G. Volkman, Resource Conservationist, at (785) 823-4568, or [chad.volkman@ks.usda.gov](mailto:chad.volkman@ks.usda.gov).

*(Signed)*

ERIC B. BANKS  
State Conservationist

Attachments